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IN THE EMERGENCE
OF CIVILIZATION:
ÇATALHÖYÜK
AS A CASE STUDY

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Modes of religiosity at Çatalhöyük

Harvey Whitehouse and Ian Hodder

Introduction

Social and cultural phenomena are organized and transmitted in highly patterned ways. Understanding the nature and causes of these patterns can help us to reconstruct some features of prehistoric societies that might otherwise remain undiscovered. The patterns we consider in this chapter concern the relationship between certain features of *ritual performance* (especially emotionality, frequency and exegetical thinking), on the one hand, and certain features of *social morphology* (especially the scale, structure and cohesiveness of ancient cults), on the other. We will show that from comparatively fragmentary information concerning the nature of prehistoric rituals at Çatalhöyük we can infer a surprisingly rich picture of how religious knowledge may have been constituted, transmitted and transformed over the lifetime of the settlement and how ritually based coalitions formed, interacted and changed. Our aim is to use a broad understanding of modes of religiosity to throw light on the evidence from Çatalhöyük and to open up discussion of some of the causal links between ritual performance and social and political structure at the site. By combining broad anthropological understanding with the specific data from Çatalhöyük, we believe that some interpretations can be shown to be more plausible than others.

The theory of modes of religiosity

The patterns we seek to investigate at Çatalhöyük stem from two rather different ways of conducting and experiencing rituals. A striking observation from the cross-cultural study of contemporary and historical rituals is that the intensity of *emotional arousal* experienced by participants in

a ritual is inversely proportional to the *frequency* of performance. Rituals that are only very rarely performed are usually quite exciting and dramatic occasions, punctuated by a great deal of sensory pageantry. By contrast, rituals that are performed on a regular basis are on the whole comparatively tame affairs. Thus, rituals tend to occur in two main varieties: (1) low-frequency, high-arousal (typical examples would be rites of passage, royal and state rituals, millenarian cults) and (2) high-frequency, low-arousal rituals (e.g., liturgical rituals, blessings, propitiatory rites).

Investigations into this bifurcation of ritual forms led to a more general theory of 'modes of religiosity', based on a distinction between doctrinal and imagistic dynamics (Whitehouse 1995, 2000, 2004). The doctrinal mode is based on frequently repeated teachings and rituals. Much of the religious knowledge is codified in language and transmitted primarily via recognized leaders and authoritative texts. High-frequency ritual performances allow complex networks of ideas to be transmitted and stored in memory as relatively schematized encyclopedic knowledge, leading to the standardization of teachings in collective memory. Unauthorized deviations from the standard canon thus become easy to identify. At the same time, routinization tends to suppress certain kinds of creative thinking about the meanings of the rituals, reducing the risks of innovation. For both reasons, frequent repetition of rituals and creeds contributes to (and correlates highly with) the establishment of religious orthodoxies. The emphasis on verbally codified doctrines and narratives facilitates highly efficient and rapid spread, through processes of evangelism and missionization. The emphasis on oratory and learning also facilitates the emergence of venerable leaders and teachers: gurus, prophets and priests. This fact, and the emphasis on standardization and orthodoxy, facilitate the emergence of centralized ecclesiastic hierarchies, exerting influence over the content and organization of authoritative religious knowledge.

By contrast, the imagistic mode of religiosity is based on rare, climactic rituals – for instance, the traumas of initiation, collective possession and mystery cults – typically involving extreme forms of deprivation, the infliction of physical pain or participation in psychologically disturbing acts. Such practices trigger enduring and vivid episodic memories for ritual ordeals, encouraging long-term rumination on the mystical significance of the acts and artifacts involved. Imagistic practices are much harder to spread than doctrinal traditions. A major reason for this is that the religious knowledge emerges out of collective participation in rituals

Table 5.1. Modes of religiosity contrasted

Variable	Doctrinal	Imagistic
	<i>Psychological features</i>	
1. Transmissive frequency	High	Low
2. Level of arousal	Low	High
3. Principal memory system	Semantic schemas and implicit scripts	Episodic/flashbulb memory
4. Ritual meaning	Learned/acquired	Internally generated
5. Techniques of revelation	Rhetoric, logical integration, narrative	Iconicity, multivocality and multivalence
	<i>Sociopolitical features</i>	
6. Social cohesion	Diffuse	Intense
7. Leadership	Dynamic	Passive/absent
8. Inclusivity/exclusivity	Inclusive	Exclusive
9. Spread	Rapid, efficient	Slow, inefficient
10. Scale	Large scale	Small scale
11. Degree of uniformity	High	Low
12. Structure	Centralized	Noncentralized

Source: Whitehouse (2004).

rather than being summed up in speech or text. Traumatic rituals also create strong bonds among those who experience them together, establishing in people's memories who was present when a particular cycle of rituals took place. The tendency is toward localized cults, based on patterns of following by example, and so we never find the same kind of scale, uniformity, centralization or hierarchical structure that typifies the doctrinal mode.

All religious traditions dominated by the doctrinal mode by definition incorporate highly repetitive forms of ritual and oratory. Under certain conditions, however, this kind of routinization can give rise to boredom and lowered motivation. What we find is that, in conditions of demoralization, techniques of policing the orthodoxy typically become less effective, resulting in the emergence and spread of more idiosyncratic (nonstandard) versions. This in turn commonly triggers a backlash in the form of movements of doctrinal reform. Often these reformations entail high levels of religious excitement, triggering imagistic-type revelations and a rejuvenation of doctrinal authority. Once the religious police are back in power, we typically witness a return to routinization. Thus, although doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity in many respects contrast starkly (see Table 5.1), they also often occur together within

a single tradition, as relatively discrete phases or domains of operation. Indeed, the vulnerability of the doctrinal mode to over- and underpolicing makes periodic imagistic outbursts more or less inevitable.

The modes theory is intended to capture and explain certain recurrent trends with respect to religious organization and transformation globally and historically. Much effort has been invested in testing the modes theory using detailed case studies from religions around the world and stretching back into the recorded past (Whitehouse and Laidlaw 2004; Whitehouse and Martin 2004, 2005). Currently a new project is under way that seeks to test the core predictions of the modes theory¹ against 645 religious rituals selected from a sample of 75 cultures around the globe.² The advantage of this method is that it will enable us to quantify more precisely correlations between variables that are predicted to covary within doctrinal and imagistic clusters and to assess statistically the impact of historically contingent factors influencing those correlations. In relation to our efforts to apply the modes theory to Catalhöyük, the claims put forward in this chapter are evaluated in relation to the specific data from the site, but they also stimulate further data acquisition so that the claims can be made more or less plausible.

In a series of publications Whitehouse has argued that the imagistic mode of religiosity is much more ancient than the doctrinal mode. In his original formulation, imagistic practices dated at least as far back as the Upper Palaeolithic, whereas doctrinal dynamics emerged only in concert with the establishment of early state formations. Whitehouse

¹ These core predictions may be enumerated as follows: (1) The frequency of a ritual will be inversely proportional to the level of arousal it induces in participants (arousal inducers include sensory pageantry, singing, dancing, music, altered states of consciousness and painful or traumatic procedures). (2) Lower-frequency rituals will entail higher peak arousal than will higher-frequency rituals. (3) Lower-frequency rituals will generate greater volume and elaborateness of Spontaneous Exegetical Reflection. (4) Conversely, higher-frequency rituals will occur in traditions that transmit greater volume and elaborateness of verbally (or textually) transmitted doctrine and narrative. (5) The frequency of a ritual will be inversely proportional to the level of cohesion it induces in ritual participants. (6) Religions with high-frequency rituals will spread faster than traditions that lack high-frequency rituals. (7) Religions with high-frequency rituals will be larger than traditions that lack high-frequency rituals. (8) Religions with high-frequency rituals will be more hierarchical than traditions that lack high-frequency rituals.

² This research forms part of an international collaborative project funded by the European Commission, details of which may be found at <http://www.cam.ox.ac.uk/research/explaining-religion>.

argued that one of the key sites of spontaneous emergence of the doctrinal mode was Lower Mesopotamia some six thousand years ago. A prominent bone of contention with regard to this argument has been, not whether doctrinal practices are in evidence during that early flowering of civilizations, but whether the doctrinal mode *was triggered by the advent of writing systems* (as proposed by Goody 2004; Boyer 2005) or whether the appearance of doctrinal dynamics *helped to foster the development and spread of inscribing practices* and ultimately fully developed literate traditions (as argued by Whitehouse 2000, 2004; Johnson 2004; Mithen 2004).³ The evidence presented in this chapter would support the latter view. But it would also place the emergence of the doctrinal mode in western Asia at a rather earlier point in the region's prehistory than originally proposed. We argue in this chapter that the seeds of the doctrinal mode were already germinating by the end of the period of settlement at Çatalhöyük.

We are not the first to consider this possibility. Steven Mithen recently noted the evidence for modes of religiosity at Çatalhöyük as part of a more ambitious effort to discern the operation of imagistic dynamics and the gradual appearance of the doctrinal mode in western Asia between 20,000 and 7000 BC.⁴ He argued, as we do, that the modes theory could 'enrich our interpretations for specific aspects of the archaeological record, make some interpretations more plausible than others, and help us identify previously unrecognised causal links between religious practices and political structure' (Mithen 2004: 18). Nevertheless, Mithen's

³ As Mithen observes, 'The sheer size of the settlement, the suggestion of a deity and rulers, and the architectural conformity of the structures would suggest that we are dealing with a type of religiosity that tends toward the doctrinal rather than imagistic mode in Whitehouse's terms, even though there is no evidence of literacy' (2004: 36).

⁴ According to Mithen, 'In these regards, therefore, the interpretations of Çatalhöyük emerging from the 1990s research appear more compatible with an imagistic mode of religiosity. But one key aspect of Mellaart's interpretation remains valid – the extent of architectural conformity among buildings regarding the locations of domestic fittings and wall art. Hodder's program of work has verified claims for annual replastering of walls within the main rooms, and in some cases at much more frequent intervals, along with regular replastering of the bull-head sculptures (W. Matthews, personal communication). From this, one gains an impression of immense conformity and routinization in people's lives that seems more compatible with Whitehouse's notion of doctrinal religiosity. Whether this impression will be verified by full publication of the new research remains to be seen' (2004: 36).

assessment of the evidence was inconclusive with regard to the emergence of doctrinal dynamics at Çatalhöyük. We think we can offer a bolder and also more detailed account.

Low-frequency, high-arousal rituals at Çatalhöyük

The most reliable diagnostic feature of the imagistic mode is the presence of collective rituals that are performed no more frequently than once a year (in many cases much less frequently than that). Setting aside for the moment what we mean by the term 'ritual' (this issue becomes more pressing later), we describe such rituals as 'low frequency'. Low-frequency rituals typically evince higher peaks of emotional arousal among participants than can be discerned in frequently performed rites. Widely recurrent triggers of arousal in such rituals include the infliction of pain by means of beating, whipping, burning, piercing, scarification, tattooing, removal of body parts, laceration of the tongue or insertion of bones or other sharp objects through sensitive tissue. Commonly, however, such rituals also entail psychological torments, such as threatening, abandoning, kidnapping, humiliating, incarcerating, insulting and browbeating. Along with these ordeals it is common for participants to undergo trials of endurance: fasting, dehydration, athletic feats, solitary confinement or sleep deprivation. Given the emphasis on negatively valenced arousal, these practices have been dubbed 'rites of terror' (Whitehouse 1996), but some low-frequency rituals also entail an ecstatic component either due to masochistic aspects (e.g., the autoeroticism of penis-bleeding procedures reported in Papua New Guinea; Lewis 1980) or a sense of intense relief at having surmounted the ordeals. While it is hardly surprising that few cultural traditions require the performance of rites of terror on a daily or weekly basis (or confine such routine torture to a select minority of adherents), a more astonishing observation is the scarcity of low-frequency rituals that do not also entail exceptionally high levels of peak arousal, occasioned by the kinds of ordeals just outlined. Insofar as low-frequency, low-arousal rituals occur at all, they generally turn out to be variants of high-frequency rituals, cobbled together and spiced up so as to mark special occasions of various kinds. But genuinely low-frequency rituals (comprising clusters of procedures only rarely encountered by most participants) are typically very emotive.

This claim has been demonstrated using a large sample of contemporary religions,⁵ and at Çatalhöyük there is at least some independent archaeological evidence that low-frequency rituals associated with hunting, feasting, dancing and burial of human remains were occasions that also involved high levels of peak emotional arousal. Having considered this evidence, we will turn to the general causal mechanisms responsible for ensuring that low-frequency ritual performances carry such a powerful 'kick'.

Evidence for low-frequency, high-arousal rituals at Çatalhöyük comes in part from pictorial remains. Two houses in Levels V and III have wall paintings that show the teasing and baiting of wild animals (bulls, deer, boars, a bear) by crowds of people, in one case clearly bearded (Mellaart 1966, 1967). The hunting and baiting scenes show animals with erect penises. In the deposits on the site it is clear that the meat-bearing parts of wild bulls are often associated with feasting events. The meat-bearing parts of deer and boars are rarely found on-site, and researchers have so far found the claws of only one bear. Other rare finds are a leopard claw and the talons of large raptors. So it seems possible to argue that on rare occasions wild animals and birds were killed, perhaps at times in association with male feats of bravery and strength. Consumption of many of these animals took place off-site, but the wild bull meat was eaten and distributed to feasts on-site. The hard and dangerous parts of these animals (claws, horns, antlers, tusks, talons) were then inserted as trophies or memories into the walls of the houses, where they were repeatedly plastered over as part of the general plastering of the house walls. The scale and emotional tonus of teasing and baiting at Çatalhöyük can be determined partly by the large number of human figures in scenes depicted in surviving artwork at the site. The haunches of the wild bulls at Çatalhöyük stood 2 m in height. Bringing down or teasing and baiting such an animal would have presented grave danger (perhaps even resulting in fatalities). The teasing and baiting scenes seem to be accompanied by dancing and music (as seen in the apparent rattles and drums depicted).

⁵ Comparison of more than 500 rituals recorded in the Human Relations Area Files database, carried out by Quentin Atkinson, and Harvey Whitehouse, shows a striking inverse correlation between performance frequency and peak emotional arousal (full results yet to be written and published).

Feasts resulting from such kills at Çatalhöyük would have been moments of high social drama, not only because of the fear and danger occasioned by the quarry but also because of the sheer scale of such social events. It has been estimated that the meat from a wild bull could have fed a thousand people (based on figures from contemporary feasts using domestic cattle in central Anatolia). And the faunal remains at Çatalhöyük provide additional clues to the scale and frequency of feasting events on-site. As to scale, it seems possible that parts of animals were distributed to houses or house groups, as there is often some sidedness involved in the distributions of parts. For example, Building 52 had 11 left bull horns stacked above a bucranium. It seems that certain houses received certain parts of animals in feasts. Even so, a considerable number could have been involved, and the feasting deposits often contain the remains of bones of more than one animal. As to frequency, if we identify the installations of bull horns on walls as the main markers of significant feasting events and rituals, the maximum is 6 in one house, and a stack of 11 uninstalled horns has just been mentioned. Similarly, few deposits have been found that seem to result from major feasts – in the region of 1–3 per house. If we estimate the houses as enduring for about 80 years, then we have events involving feasting and wild animals occurring every 7–80 years.

Foundation rituals associated with the houses would have occurred every 70–100 years, and in some cases they appear to be associated with feasts. There is frequent evidence that house foundation was associated with highly charged events such as the burial of neonates and young children, and the placing of human skulls at the base of house posts. In the case of Building 42, the foundation of the house was accompanied by the burial of a man holding the plastered skull of a woman. The burial of neonates and young children in the foundations of houses perhaps implies involvement with a larger group than the inhabitants of these houses (suggested to be five to eight people per house on average, too small a group to produce a cluster of neonate burials at the time of house foundation). There may, in fact, have been some association between the closure and foundation of a house and the death of significant individuals in the house. The care taken in preparing houses for closure and rebuilding suggests elaborate ceremony and intense focus.

Determining the frequency of burial is complicated by a number of factors at Çatalhöyük, including the fact that some houses (the ‘history

houses') can have up to 62 burials in them, while others can have none or very few. Clearly the dead were preferentially buried in certain houses. It is also likely that not all people were buried in houses on the site (as is seen from the human remains in the off-site KOPAL Area). Infant burials are common, but it is difficult to know whether all infants were buried in houses. But if the average number of noninfant burials per house at Çatalhöyük is 5–10, and if buildings last for 70–100 years, then burial for each house (though not necessarily in that house) would have occurred every 10 years or so. The burial ritual itself involved little in the way of elaborate artifacts or bodily treatment – the bodies were often tied in a tight crouched position before being deposited with few artifacts. In some cases, heads were later removed, and a significant factor in burial would have been the disturbance and handling of bones that had earlier been placed in the grave. As for other performative ritual, throughout the Middle Eastern Neolithic there is evidence of an association between treatment of the dead and birds of prey, including vultures. At Çatalhöyük there are depictions of vultures with apparent human legs, and a crane dance has been suggested by Russell and McGowan (2003) on the basis of the treatment of some crane wing bones at the site. It is possible that the dressing up of people as birds is indicative of the 'trickster' figure seen in many myths and rituals (Hodder and Meskell, Chapter 2). Other, highly charged aspects of the burial ritual included the careful removal of skulls and other body parts from already buried and partially decayed bodies. The care shown in the removal of the heads and body parts belies an elaborate anatomical knowledge and a delicate attention to detail. There are cut marks on some bones resulting from head removal, and it is probable that obsidian blades were used for the task. A skull was in one case replastered, and there are other instances of red paint being applied to skulls. All this suggests that burial was a relatively rare occurrence, involving collective decision making (as in the decision regarding the location of the burial) and highly charged cultural myths and practices.

Mystery cult at Çatalhöyük

Wherever we find low-frequency, high-arousal rituals, we generally find traditions of esoteric revelation and ritual exegesis, typically stewarded by elders and ritual experts. This pattern has been repeatedly observed across a broad range of traditional societies in the contemporary world, from

West African male cults (e.g., Højbjerg 2004) to Amazonian shamanism (e.g., Verswijver 1992) and from New Guinea initiations (e.g., Barth 1987) to firewalkers in northern Greece (Xygalatas 2008). It has also been discerned time and again in the documented past: from studies of early Christians (Leopold 2004) to medieval nuns (e.g., Clark 2004) and from the religions of ancient Greece (Martin 2004) to the Dionysian cults of the Roman Empire (Beck 2004). Unpacking the causes of this pattern will furnish us with an explanation of the strong correlation observed between low-frequency ritual performances and elevated emotional intensity.

Rituals that are seldom performed but carry a powerful emotional punch are remembered as distinctive episodes in people's lives. These 'episodic' memories (Tulving 1972) specify all kinds of details about the acts and artifacts involved in the ritual performance, as well as many other unique features of the experience. These memories tend to last, perhaps even enduring for a lifetime. And often they incorporate a certain vividness or realism that has led some researchers to use the label 'flashbulb memory' to designate episodic recall with a particular canonical structure, specifying details not only of what happened, but of who was present, how one felt, what happened immediately afterward and so on (Winograd and Killinger 1983). Extensive psychological research into the workings of flashbulb memory has helped to explain how the distinctiveness (rarity) of an event, combined with its emotional impact, results in such durable and vivid recall (Conway 1995). But we are only now beginning to understand the implications of activating this kind of memory system in recall for *ritual* events. This is where we need briefly to clarify what we mean by 'ritual'.

There may be a number of ways of distinguishing behaviors that are ritualized from those that are not. But the salient feature for our purposes is that ritualized actions are never entirely reducible to a set of technical motivations. They incorporate features that do not contribute in any practical fashion to the goal of the action and are not intended to do so. In some cases rituals are composed entirely of acts for which no technical motivation is patently evident. One cannot infer from the actions or the intentions of the actor why such procedures should be performed at all. A matter of conventional stipulation, the origins of ritual scripts lie with those who came before, the details often lost in the mists of time. This state of affairs offers great scope for exegetical interpretation. Sometimes we are told the meanings of ritual procedures by acknowledged

authorities. Sometimes we have no idea what the details of a ritual might mean. Only in rather unusual circumstances do we dwell at length on questions of exegesis. Low-frequency, high-arousal rituals are occasions of that kind. Since the memories of these unusual experiences endure, so does the puzzle of what it all meant. Consider the following concrete example.

In northern Greece, a community of orthodox Christians calling themselves "Anastenaria" dance on red hot coals as part of a cycle of rituals to honor various local and national saints. This moderately low frequency ritual involves predictably high levels of emotional arousal, assisted by loud music, frenetic dancing and bloody animal sacrifice. But by far the most dramatic and emotionally intense feature of the rituals is the act of walking on red hot coals. Anthropologist Dimitris Xygalatas (2007) gathered extensive statements about the meanings of various rituals in the Anastenaria. The rituals were not accorded any official or authorized meanings – indeed, the Greek Orthodox Church, which normally assumed an authoritative position in matters of doctrine and ritual exegesis, officially took a rather dim view of the tradition. As a result people felt at liberty to interpret the rituals as they pleased. Xygalatas found that the number of people capable of proffering interpretations of the rituals of the Anastenaria increased in direct ratio with the degree of emotional arousal that the rituals evoked. In relation to rituals that (although they had emotive qualities) were not associated with especially intense affective states (e.g., the use of candles or incense, commensality, the handling of icons of the saints), only relatively few people were able to explain their significance and meaning. By contrast, many more people offered interpretations of the most arousing aspects of the annual rituals – like the slaying of animals or the frenetic music and dancing. But the most striking finding concerned the terrifying ordeal of walking on coals. This part of the ritual produced by far the highest arousal levels. And on that topic, the proportion of informants offering exegetical commentaries rose dramatically. This was not because the firewalking had a widely known meaning; in fact, participants had highly varied notions of what it meant to walk on red hot coals. They seemed to be arriving at their own interpretations quite independently, via a process of 'spontaneous exegetical reflection'.

In order to understand better the psychological mechanisms that make low-frequency, high-arousal rituals more likely to trigger deep reflection

on issues of ritual meaning, Whitehouse and colleagues have been conducting psychological experiments, using artificial rituals (Richert, Whitehouse and Stewart 2005). In these studies, participants are divided into low-arousal and high-arousal groups. Although the ritual procedures are never varied, participants' emotional states are manipulated by a variety of techniques, including 'high-tech' special effects. Afterward, participants are asked by trained interviewers to describe the entire ritual process and proffer any thoughts as to the possible meanings of each element of the ritual. The resulting exegetical commentaries are then coded for both volume and analogical specificity. Such experiments have repeatedly shown that in the high-arousal condition participants score significantly better on both measures.

Taking together the evidence from ethnography, historiography and psychological experiments, it would seem that the clustering of features already noted is an outcome of cultural selection. Low-frequency rituals that lack a significant emotional kick would be incapable of generating the mnemonic and exegetical effects needed to give salience to the acts involved. Low-frequency rituals that survive will be ones that evince powerful emotions and lasting and vivid memories, and thus encourage long-term rumination on esoteric puzzles of exegetical meaning. This is the essence of mystery cult. What these investigations suggest is that where low-frequency but highly arousing rituals flourish, we will also inevitably find that people reflect deeply on religious mysteries and problems of ritual exegesis, on the notion that hidden or nonobvious features of the world can be revealed, brought out into the light through slow and painstaking processes of reflection on questions of ritual meaning and purpose.

Such a picture of religious life at Çatalhöyük sits well with the archaeological evidence. Hodder has discussed elsewhere the evidence for a focus on hiding and revealing of significant symbols at Çatalhöyük (Hodder 2006). Obsidian hoards were placed beneath floors in the early part of the sequence and periodically retrieved. Paintings were made and then covered over, often then being remade and recovered. The spots on a pair of leopards were repainted in new designs 40 times in Building VIB.44 and more than 7 times in VII.44 (Mellaart 1967: 119; Todd 1976: 57). The claws of bears, the teeth of foxes and weasels, the tusks of wild boars and the beaks of vultures were placed in walls, covered over and then repeatedly covered over while being present as protuberances. Burials

were reexcavated to retrieve skulls and body parts. There was a continual process of hiding and revelation.

Bucrania (plastered bull heads installed in walls of houses and on the upright posts) as well as bull horns set along benches may have provided a daily focal point for rumination on male cult rituals. The horns, claws and tusks placed in and hidden in the walls, sometimes visible only because of the swelling of plaster over them, 'presenced' the bull killing and feasting. At least in the first half of the occupation of Çatalhöyük (when the bucrania and installations are more common), the symbols of feasting and ritual power were ever present in the house, continual reminders of significant dramatic events.

Religious coalitions at Çatalhöyük

A further feature of the imagistic mode concerns social morphology, specifically the relationship between patterns of ritual frequency, emotionality and revelation, on the one hand, and the scale, structure and interaction of ritual groupings, on the other. Rare, climactic, revelatory rituals bind participants tightly together into highly cohesive groups. In part this is because the emotionality of the shared experience binds people together, a well-established principle in social psychology that requires little additional evidential support. But it is also partly a consequence of episodic recall – the fact that most people can remember exactly who else was present when the major ritual took place (Whitehouse 1992, 2004). Cohesive ritual communities forged in this way are therefore somewhat exclusive, in that one cannot easily fabricate a memory that somebody was present who was not or excise from memory the recollection of another's participation. This exclusivity and cohesiveness also promotes a somewhat egalitarian ethos among members of the in-group and, above all, a sense of loyalty in the face of danger. As such, groups formed by such means lend themselves admirably to perilous exploits where temptations to defect would otherwise be hard to resist. In many societies where the imagistic mode flourishes, this means that ritual groupings constitute military cells or raiding parties. But at Çatalhöyük, as has also been found in many other places, cohesive ritual groups were probably essential for the cooperative hunting of exceptionally dangerous wild animals. The pursuit of wild bulls and other large aggressive animals in the vicinity of Çatalhöyük would undoubtedly have been a hazardous undertaking

requiring high levels of social cohesion and cooperation. Pictorial depictions of hunting suggest that upwards of 30 individuals would have been needed to capture a bull.

There are strong reasons also to connect hunting activities with mortuary practices. The finding in 2008 of a platform within Building 77 containing burials but entirely surrounded by, embraced by, protected by wild bull horns expresses the connection well (Figure 12.1). Again, this connection occurs from early on in the Neolithic. Schmidt (2006) argues that the ‘temples’ at Göbekli Tepe, replete with their carvings of bulls and other wild animals on monumental stone stelae, functioned as temples for the dead.

Closer examination of mortuary practices at Çatalhöyük fits well with our hypothesis that the imagistic mode fragmented the community into a multiplicity of small cohesive coalitions, each pursuing its own distinctive variants of a wider revelatory tradition. Most houses excavated to date contain no or few (up to five or six) burials beneath the floors. However, some houses seem to have acted as repositories of burials for small groups of houses. Approximately three to five houses, sometimes connected by crawl holes and the sharing of ovens and hearths, buried their dead (62 individuals in Building 1, but more commonly 20–30 individuals) preferentially in one ancestral building (‘history houses’, i.e., houses rebuilt on the same place four or more times that became the preferential repositories of burials and material symbols; see Chapter 7). Houses were often ‘pushed and shoved’ to be near these ancestral houses, and at times the houses were so packed together that the houses were very small. Sometimes they seem so small that they may have acted as symbolic ‘place savers’, claiming a presence close to the ancestral home. Abandonment and foundation feasts and rituals may also have taken place at this scale. There are examples of construction ‘rafts’ connecting pairs of houses and implying contemporary construction, and there are, especially in the lower levels of the site (up to Level VI), feasting deposits associated with founding and abandonment events. The cult of the dead also involved vultures, as seen in the wall art, and the removal of human heads from burials. These heads were themselves involved in founding houses (placed at the base of upright posts) and in abandoning them (placed in abandonment deposits). There is evidence also in the wall paintings that humans dressed up in vulture costumes, and we also have evidence of crane dance costumes (Russell and McGowan 2003). So the cult of the

dead involved small corporate groups, linked by descent in houses, and a series of ritual themes and practices involving birds, dancing and the manipulation of skeletal remains.

Current evidence suggests that most burial involved the interment of wholly fleshed and tightly bound bodies. These were placed in shallow graves beneath the burial platforms in northern parts of the rooms, though neonates and very young children were often buried in the southern, oven and entrance part of the house. Later burials were added into the burial platforms, leading to the disturbance and rearranging of earlier skeletons. Skulls from earlier burials were removed from the bodies of important individuals by digging down into the graves and cutting off the partially fleshed heads using obsidian knives that left cut marks on the upper vertebrae. These skulls were often kept and, in one known case, were 'refleshed' by molding facial features in plaster and painting the plaster red. In another case, the head was left on the body but the legs and arms, including scapulae and clavicles, were carefully and neatly cut off, showing a detailed knowledge of the human corpse (Building 49). There are examples also of the skeletal form of an individual being re-created from the bones of several individuals, as well as the removal of teeth from an earlier jaw and their placement in a later grave in the same building sequence (see Chapter 7). There are also examples of secondary reburial of bodies or body parts – for example, into the 'history house' Building 1.

In many ways, the burial practices at Çatalhöyük replicate those found throughout the early Neolithic in the Middle East and in central Anatolia. And there are many practices that are common across the site, such as crouched burial within houses and with few grave goods. But at a more detailed level, there are many differences in the ways that the dead were treated in the small corporate house groups at Çatalhöyük. For example, in Space 129 in Level VII we found an utterly unusual burial. Animal bones never occur in graves at the site. But in this one grave a whole sheep with its front and back legs extended was laid out close to the body of a male. In two other cases the body was stacked with the scat from a small carnivore such as a weasel (Jenkins 2005). In another case the body was laid on its back with legs apart, and a mat and plank were placed over the body (Hodder 2006). While Mellaart claimed regularities in the platforms under which the different sexes were buried (females under the central eastern platform and males under the northeastern platform),

the more recent excavations have found marked variability in the relations between age and sex and burial location. Where there are continuities these seem vertical within house clusters. Thus in the sequence of four houses, 65–56–44–10, in the same place, repeating the same foundations, there is a recurring use of the central eastern platform for burial and the burial of infants in the southwest corner of the main room (Regan 2007).

There is much evidence that there were clear memories within house clusters of the exact location and significance of the burials beneath the platform floors. Later digging down led to the precise location of earlier graves and skulls. These memories must have extended over considerable intervals. The average number of burials per house is about eight. And yet the average duration of houses is 70–100 years. Thus burial in houses may have occurred every 10 or so years. Cessford (2005) has estimated that about one-third of the population was buried off-site, and it is here that we would expect to find practices related to the scenes shown in the paintings of excarnation of headless bodies and the removal of flesh by vultures. There is no evidence of excarnation on the bodies found on the site. But in the KOPAL trench off-site we found human body parts treated in the same way as animal bones and mixed in with them and other ‘refuse’. We know little about the treatment of human remains off-site, but they occurred still more rarely than those on the site.

The emergence of the doctrinal mode at Çatalhöyük

The Templeton project has focused attention on the gradual shift at Çatalhöyük toward more discursive styles of transmission in the upper levels of the site, based on evidence from stamp seals and pictorial depictions that suggest narrative interpretation. This transition also suggests that increasingly widely distributed narrative traditions may have been homogenizing across the settlement, consistent with the emergence of a doctrinal mode of religiosity. Such developments would have required relatively high frequency transmission. Imagistic practices are too low in frequency to sustain bodies of discursive religious knowledge. In order for a relatively stable corpus of cosmology, narrative and ritual exegesis to form and spread, much higher transmissive frequencies would be required.

There is a decline in the occurrence of actual bull horns and other wild animal part installations in the upper levels of the site. While some

bucrania continue, these often have plaster rather than real horns. Indeed, there is much evidence that hunting declined in the upper levels of the site; there may have been fewer wild bulls present in the landscape. Rather than real bull horns and heads, small symbolic bull heads are found from Level V as handles on pottery. As already noted, the paintings of teasing and baiting scenes also occur from Level V onward, and these have a clear narrative component. They have become part of a discourse about ritual acts.

The greater discursive component of religious life in the upper levels of the site is also seen in the emergence after Level V of stamp seals. These may have been used to stamp human or animal skin, and they employ a distinct array of codified signs (Türkcan 2005). These signs are abstract but some refer to hands and perhaps to navels, while there are a few examples that indicate a leopard and a bear.

In the lower levels of the site, as already noted, obsidian is 'presenced' in hoards or caches below the floors. In the upper levels these hoards cease and obsidian becomes more bound by new specialist technologies. Pottery too becomes more complex and more specialized after Level V. It gradually becomes more decorated until, by the time of Çatalhöyük West (Chalcolithic, from 6000 BC), it is heavily decorated with complex designs. By the time of the West Mound as well, burial in houses of adults largely ends. It is presumed that burial occurs off-site and perhaps in cemeteries. Certainly the earlier fragmentation of burial practices is replaced by something larger scale and perhaps more centralized. The rituals involved in the abandoning of houses also change. Now frequently houses are burned (from Level VI onward on the Neolithic East Mound). This suggests uniform, sitewide practices.

Thus in the upper levels at the site there is less evidence of dramatic and rare imagistic events and more evidence of higher-frequency, low-intensity and discursively elaborated rituals. How can we account for the emergence of increasingly routinized religious life at the site – its dispersal into daily codes and practices, in contrast to the presencing of powerful indices of dramatic events seen in the earlier levels?

One hypothesis is that the doctrinal mode emerges from within the interstices of the imagistic mode. We have seen that the presencing of trophies of dramatic and dangerous events was a key component of the imagistic mode at Çatalhöyük. Brought into and installed in the house, the hard and dangerous parts of wild animals and birds were continually

present, able to be ruminated upon, the power of the event continually felt and referred to and lived with. These active symbols were continually reawakened by replasterings and sometimes repainting (such as the continual repainting of designs on the bucrania in Mellaart's Shrine EVI.8; Mellaart 1963). The walls of the houses at Çatalhöyük were replastered every season and perhaps every month in a new white marl slurry, carefully prepared and applied. There was, then, something highly repetitive and routinized even within this imagistic religious mode.

Indeed, the repetition and routinization were themselves central components in the building of histories within long-term buildings – those we have dubbed 'history houses'. The latter houses become dominant in the lower levels of the site in the sense that they have more burials and are to some degree more elaborate in terms of architectural fittings (Düring 2001). The history houses are distinguished by the amassing and passing down of trophies and ritual symbols. But they are also distinguished by the careful repetition of house practices, the internal arrangements of the house and the multiple layers of plasters on the floors and walls. They do indeed distinguish themselves in terms of amassing and creating histories.

It seems possible that the elders, ritual leaders, 'shamans' associated with the history houses increasingly developed doctrinal strategies by building discursive forms of knowledge out of the preexisting forms. Rather than the largely embodied practices in the lower part of the site, discursive modes could be built in the upper levels. It is possible that the increasingly discursive religious practices of the doctrinal mode exploited and extended ideas originating in the imagistic cult complexes, the latter periodically invigorating and underscoring them.

A simple contributing impulse would have been the 'hunting out' of wild cattle that we seem to see in the upper part of the site. By the time of the West Mound, domesticated cattle are in use. It is likely that other wild animals (leopards, boars, etc.) were less present in the landscape than before and were thus less available for celebrating and presencing the imagistic mode. At the same time, in the upper part of the site, centralizing tendencies are increasingly present in pottery and obsidian production, and in the emergence of large houses based on integrated and more intensive production of domesticated plants and animals. This social transformation seems to have been associated with the transformation of history houses into large complex centers of production, greater specialization and the development of more doctrinal modes.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to reconstruct certain features of religious life at Çatalhöyük based on a combination of generalizable theory and the interpretations that we and others have made of the archaeological evidence. Others have taken on comparable tasks (e.g., Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005), and always the danger is that the interpretations will become ‘infected’ with the cross-cultural model such that Çatalhöyük gets forced into an interpretive scheme when other interpretations remain possible. Archaeological data are often underdetermined, and despite the richness of our evidence from the site, the interpretation of religion at Çatalhöyük remains open to revision and reinterpretation. Have we, in this chapter, avoided the temptation to force a complex cross-cultural scheme on the data?

We concur with Mithen (2004) that the clearest evidence from Çatalhöyük concerns low-frequency rituals that would have had high-arousal components. There seems little doubt that socialized and ritualized interactions with large and dangerous animals, and concomitant feasting, would have occurred relatively infrequently and would have been high-arousal events. Other aspects of the Çatalhöyük data can be interpreted as conforming to the expectations of the imagistic mode summarized in Table 5.1. For example, as the hard, pointed parts of the animals killed in hunting or teasing and baiting were brought into individual houses, there must have been much variation in the specific interpretations that were made. Thus there must have been multivocality and multivalence, as is indicated by the great diversity of specific interactions with the bucrania and other animal body parts in individual houses. For example, usually the benches with bull horns occur on the east side of main rooms in houses, but in Building 52 a bench with bull horns occurs on the west side.

It also seems likely that, according to the imagistic mode expectations, Çatalhöyük society was relatively decentralized, although in Chapter 7, Hodder and Pels argue for some social differentiation between history houses and other houses, and the possible role of a ‘trickster’ figure is discussed by Hodder and Meskell in Chapter 2. But it is perhaps the burial practices that offer the greatest interpretive challenge. These have imagistic components in that death and burial, at least of adults, were relatively infrequent, and they presumably involved emotions of bereavement and

interactions with dead and decaying bodies that can be interpreted as high arousal. But we also need to proceed cautiously in drawing inferences of this kind. It is possible that the inhabitants at Çatalhöyük rejoiced in their proximity to the dead, content to dwell in their remains and odors and to touch and handle the skin and bones. Given that, for example, the skulls of the dead were present in daily life, funerary and body disarticulation ceremonies need not have been highly arousing events. So although we may be able to show that low-frequency features of ritualized behavior invariably entail moments of comparatively high peak arousal (against a baseline of more frequent rituals), at least on the evidence of contemporary and historically documented cases worldwide, we may never be able to specify in detail how those moments were constructed and experienced by the people living at Çatalhöyük.

Another set of challenges surrounds the diversity of cult practices and exegetical traditions at Çatalhöyük and beyond. The imagistic mode anticipates localized cults, based on patterns of following by example, in contrast to the large scale and uniformity of traditions typical of the doctrinal mode. It is certainly the case that symbolic and ritual differences between houses can be discerned at Çatalhöyük. It is also the case that on a regional scale there are many specific differences between sites and regions, also supporting our view of a religious landscape richly fragmented into myriad local traditions. But much as Whitehouse discovered in his surveys of imagistic initiation cults and millenarian movements in Papua New Guinea (1995, 2000), we also find remarkable continuities over huge areas from what is now central Turkey into northern Syria and even into the southern Levant, for instance with regard to the importance of human head removal, the plastering of human heads, the role of vultures in death rituals and the centrality of dangerous wild animals (as Hodder and Meskell note in Chapter 2). In other words, certain broadly similar patterns of behavior can replicate widely and endure for very long periods of time even while they sustain a great profusion of localized variants in the details of ritual practice and exegetical interpretation. In the absence of a fuller understanding of these variable features, it may prove difficult to discriminate between evidence of wide diffusion of ancient patterns associated with imagistic dynamics versus evidence of truly standardized doctrinal creeds. What we think justifies our proposals regarding the emergence of the doctrinal mode at Çatalhöyük, however, is evidence not merely of *recurring themes* in the construction of acts and artifacts

at the site but, more tellingly, we venture, of the increasingly *discursive* deployment of those themes in standardized ways and the emergence of *authoritative* versions.

The emergence of doctrinal mode dynamics constitutes a major milestone in the evolution of social formations, paving the way for more centralized, large-scale and hierarchical patterns of political association. In the most general terms, the shifts toward the doctrinal mode of religiosity in the upper parts of the Çatalhöyük East sequence occur through the 7th millennium BC and the formation of the West Mound at Çatalhöyük with its more fully doctrinal mode occurs at 6000 BC. These developments thus occur at about the same time as the shift to the Pottery Neolithic in the Levant and the emergence of the elaborate decorated pottery of Hasuna in Mesopotamia. The latter is followed by the Samarran and Halafian styles in Mesopotamia that lead into Ubaid and Uruk and the emergence of Sumer in the 3rd millennium BC. It is difficult to argue for simple continuities across these huge areas and times, and indeed many would argue for radical breaks – for example, after the Pre-Pottery Neolithic in the Levant. But there is much to be said for arguing that some elements of the doctrinal mode that has emerged by around 6000 BC do indeed presage the more complex centralized political systems of Mesopotamia.

The shift to the doctrinal mode, among other changes in social and economic realms, seems to have been an important factor in setting the stage for the complex centralized societies of the Middle East. Much social theory assumes that the great transition is rooted in changing technology and modes of production. For instance, deterministic theories of literacy have been repeatedly used to account for the emergence of the doctrinal mode (e.g., Goody 2004; Boyer 2005). Theories inspired by Marxist traditions and cultural materialism have meanwhile in various guises emphasized the role of forces and relations of production in shaping early state formation. The account presented here suggests a rather different view: that it is the relationship between divergent modalities and frequencies of ritual transmission that provides the impetus for increasingly complex social morphology.

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